

# Neuroscience Graduate Handbook

Program Director:

Bernard Schreurs, PhD  
8 Medical Center Drive  
Morgantown, WV 26506  
304-293-0497  
[bschreurs@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:bschreurs@hsc.wvu.edu)

Associate Director:

Zachary Weil, PhD  
108 Biomedical Road  
Morgantown, WV 26506  
304-293-7674  
[Zachary.weil@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:Zachary.weil@hsc.wvu.edu)

Program Administrative Support:

Cassandra George  
64 Medical Center Drive  
Morgantown, WV 26506  
304-293-4771  
[Cgeorge2@hsc.wvu.edu](mailto:Cgeorge2@hsc.wvu.edu)

Updated 05/01/2025

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I.	Introduction	3
II.	Neuroscience Student Training Goals	3
III.	Selection of Dissertation Advisor	3-4
	A. Expectations of Faculty Mentors	4-6
	B. Changing Faculty Advisor	6
IV.	Selection of Dissertation Committee	6-7
V.	The Neuroscience Program Curriculum	8-11
	A. Curriculum	7
	B. Program Milestones	8
	C. Individual Development Plan	8-9
	D. Neuroscience Graduate Program Curriculum and Benchmarks Chart	10
	E. Neuroscience MD/PhD Students	11
VI.	Work Schedule, Sick Leave, Vacation, and Leave of Absence Policy	11
	A. Work Schedule	11
	B. Wellness & Illness	11
	C. Personal Leave	11
	D. Modification of Duties	12
	E. Leave of Absence Policy	12
	F. Mental Health Resources	13
VII.	Academic and Professional Standards	14-17
VIII.	Advancement to Candidacy	17
	F31+ Document and Oral Defense	17-18
IX.	Dissertation Research, Dissertation Defense and Graduation	19
	A. Dissertation Research	19
	B. Dissertation Defense	19
	C. Graduation	20

# Neuroscience Handbook

## I. Introduction

Neuroscience research at West Virginia University takes place in over 50 laboratories across campus, utilizing animal, human, and computer model systems. Research topics encompass neural development, sensory, motor and cognitive function, nervous system diseases and disorders, injury and stroke, typical aging, and neurodegeneration. Neuroscience investigators at West Virginia University strive to expand knowledge of brain function and improve the lives and health of citizens of the state, the country, and the world. We welcome students to the Neuroscience Graduate Program as they join us in this endeavor and train to become the next generation of Neuroscience researchers.

## II. Neuroscience Student Training Goals:

- Develop skills in critical thinking and problem solving;
- Read and critically interpret current scientific literature, both generally and specifically in Neuroscience;
- Gain an understanding of the functional complexities of systems neurobiology, including motor and somatosensory systems, behavior, cognitive function, developmental biology, and diseases of the nervous system;
- Develop skills to acquire and integrate knowledge in molecular and cellular structure and function of the nervous system;
- Develop awareness of the ethical issues related to animal and human experimentation and the relevant laws and regulations
- Become proficient in formulating scientific hypotheses and designing experiments to test them;
- Gain experience in conducting experimental protocols, collecting scientific data, making accurate interpretations based on the evidence, and drawing appropriate scientific conclusions;
- Learn the techniques of formal scientific writing and practice these skills when preparing research proposals, dissertations, and scientific publications;
- Practice responsible and ethical research;
- Learn to identify what qualifies as scientific misconduct and how to avoid it and gain an appreciation for the critical need for intellectual honesty and scientific integrity in research;
- Learn to ascertain that studies are scientifically rigorous, and results are robust and unbiased;
- Engage in beneficial collaborations with peers and colleagues; and
- Develop skills in oral, written, and visual communication to facilitate the transfer of information and knowledge to the scientific community and the public.

## III. Selection of Dissertation Advisor:

Students typically enter the Neuroscience Graduate Program after successful completion of the core curriculum in the first semester followed by the selection of a dissertation advisor as described in the First Year Handbook. During the first semester, students will have the opportunity for three research rotations in the laboratories of potential mentors. Selection of rotation advisors is at the discretion of the students; they may choose from the list of available mentors provided each year

by the HSC Office of Research and Graduate Education (see First Year Handbook), but discussions with their temporary advisor, graduate program directors, or the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education are strongly encouraged. Approval of each rotation advisor is required from the Office of Research and Graduate Education. After completing the rotations, students may request to join the laboratory that best fits their career and scientific plans. This process is coordinated by the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education and the selection must be agreed upon by the advisor and approved by the Office of Research and Graduate Education (see Handbook for First Year Students). For students interested in joining the Neuroscience Program, the advisor selected should typically be a member of the program. In some circumstances, a student may choose to receive their academic training and PhD in Neuroscience but select a dissertation advisor who is not a member of the Neuroscience Graduate Program. In these cases, a separate dissertation committee chair is appointed who is a member of the program and familiar with the requirements of the Neuroscience Program.

#### **A. Expectations of Faculty Mentors**

Generally, good mentoring in all its forms involves treating students respectfully and fairly, providing reliable guidance, and serving as a role model for upholding the highest ethical standards. In addition, it is important for mentors to demonstrate willingness to communicate with and to understand each student as a unique individual. Specifically, mentors should recognize and seek to understand the various cultures and circumstances of their students, and build trust and strive to create a comfortable, collegial, and respectful working environment.

Faculty mentoring of graduate students should be provided in three broad areas:

##### **1. Guiding students through degree requirements.**

- Willingness to discuss graduate program requirements and policies that are available online.
- Advising graduate students on developing a dissertation plan, including appropriate course work, research activities, and defining timelines for the completion of each step.
- Providing regular and timely feedback on the progress of graduate students toward degree requirements. This should include advising them on their preparedness to complete the written F31+Document and Oral Defense of their dissertation proposal and dissertation defense.
- Providing feedback and advice about the student's performance in coursework, where appropriate.
- Providing alternate supervision and advising of graduate students when the faculty advisor is on leave or extended absence.

##### **2. Guiding students through dissertation research.**

- Advising graduate students on the selection of a dissertation topic that offers realistic prospects for successful completion within an appropriate time frame, and on the formation of the dissertation committee. An appropriate time frame is no more than 6 total years for completion of a PhD dissertation.
- Providing training and oversight in the design of research projects, in rigorous

- research methodologies, in theoretical and technical aspects of the dissertation research, in statistical analysis and data interpretation, and in professional integrity.
- Encouraging graduate students to stay abreast of the scholarly literature and of cutting-edge ideas in the field.
  - Providing regular feedback on the progress of graduate students toward degree completion, including timely feedback on research, teaching, and other professional activities, and constructive criticism if the student's progress does not meet expectations.
  - Evaluating clearly and explicitly the strengths and weaknesses of the student's research.
  - Encouraging an open exchange of ideas, including pursuit of the student's ideas.
  - Providing and discussing clear criteria for authorship of collaborative research.
  - Assisting in finding sources to support dissertation research, such as internal and external fellowships, etc.
  - Being aware of the student's research needs and providing assistance in obtaining required resources.
  - Encouraging and constructively criticizing oral and written communication.
  - Providing timely and thoughtful feedback on manuscripts and other documents as requested.
  - Facilitating the preparation of a first-author manuscript, as well as a second manuscript (authorship not specified) to be submitted by the end of year 4.

### **3. Guiding students through professional development.**

- Encouraging participation in professional meetings of regional and national groups, as well as of learned societies and directly addressing how to network effectively at these events.
- Facilitating interactions with other scientists, on campus and in the wider professional community.
- Helping graduate students develop into successful professionals and colleagues, including encouraging students to participate and disseminate results of research activities in the appropriate scholarly or public forums.
- Facilitating career development, including advising graduate students on appropriate training and career options, as well as on the preparation of application materials for appropriate fellowships, scholarships, and other relevant opportunities.
- Assisting with applications for research funding, fellowship applications, and other applications as appropriate.
- Being the student's advocate in academic and professional communities as appropriate in the professional judgment of the mentor.
- Providing career guidance and support, including assistance in preparation of a curriculum vitae and postdoctoral applications, writing letters of recommendation in a timely manner, and helping the student prepare for interviews and other recruitment procedures.
- Providing guidance, as needed, about the intersection of concerns around physical and mental health, dealing with stress, or general well-being of the student. This requires being cognizant of campus resources that address these issues.

- Helping graduate students to develop professional skills in writing reports, papers, and grant proposals, making professional presentations, establishing professional networks, interviewing, and evaluating manuscripts and papers.

### **B. Changing Your Dissertation Advisor**

Students may need to change mentors while completing their dissertation research. The protocol for changing mentors can be found in “Mentor/Mentee Relationship – A Guide for HSC Doctoral Programs, Students, and Mentors (*Guide approved and distributed July 2023*)” The guide is located in the “HANDBOOK FOR THE GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN THE BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES” and on the Heath Sciences Center Graduate Programs SOLE site.

### **IV. Selection of Dissertation Committee**

Each student must assemble a dissertation committee, and have it approved by the end of the Fall semester of year 2. Dissertation committees must follow the University and HSC requirements in the WVU Graduate Handbook. Additional Neuroscience program requirements are as follows:

- A dissertation committee must have a minimum of 5 members;
- A dissertation committee must include a minimum of 3 Neuroscience Graduate Program faculty members;
- A majority of the members must be regular members of the Neuroscience Graduate Faculty Program, including the chair or one of the co-chairs\*;
- No more than one member may be a nonmember of the WVU graduate faculty\* (e.g., from another institution);
- The responsibility of the chair is to ensure that program guidelines are followed;
  - The advisor **may not** serve as the chair of the committee;
  - The advisor should, but is not required to, be a member of the Neuroscience Graduate faculty.
  - The committee chair will be selected by the student with input from the advisor and other committee members from among the program members on the committee;
- At least one member of the committee must be from a program other than the one in which the student is seeking a degree;
- It is “recommended that clinical scientists should be considered for committee membership when appropriate. (NOTE: It is possible that an appropriate clinical scientist may not have graduate faculty status, or associate graduate status. This would be acceptable under the rule stating that one member can be without graduate faculty membership. However, even a non-member is subject to program review and approval and should demonstrate qualifications equivalent to the qualifications for associate or full graduate membership); and
- The chair and members of the dissertation committee must be approved by the Neuroscience Program Director and the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education.
- The list of Neuroscience faculty is on this page: <https://medicine.wvu.edu/neuroscience/faculty-staff/>

\* WVU Requirement

Each student must meet with their committee at least once per year and complete a formal meeting document (comparable to an NIH non-competing renewal Progress Report – available in the Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs SOLE site/FORMS folder). It will be a multi-page template to be completed by the student at least two weeks before the scheduled meeting that includes current aims, experiments conducted, progress since the last meeting, and any changes that have been made since that meeting. This document will be distributed to the Dissertation Committee two weeks before the meeting and, following the meeting, committee recommendations will be recorded as part of the document by the Chair of the dissertation committee who will then file the document after it is approved by all parties. This document will also serve as official notification to the Graduate Student Office that the meeting has been completed. Failure to file the meeting document will result in a research grade of Incomplete that, if not remediated within a semester, reverts to a grade of “F”. In Year 5 and later years, meeting frequency will increase to twice a year, and the Program Director will attend these meetings.

Additionally, the “Committee Evaluation – Core Competencies for Development” form should be used to document each meeting and submitted to the ORGE for administrative review and placement in the student’s permanent file.

### **Committee Meeting Format:**

The committee meeting should begin with the student’s presentation of research and data to the committee. After answering any questions or requests for more information, the student will step out of the room to allow the advisor to discuss the student’s progress with the committee. Then, the advisor will step out of the room to give the student an opportunity to discuss their progress with the committee members. The first committee meeting should simply be a review of the student’s progress with coursework and potential, but not necessarily formalized, research ideas.

## **V. The Neuroscience Program Curriculum**

### **A. Curriculum:** The following are required:

- Four total courses:
  - Three specific courses in Neuroscience:
    - Fundamentals of Neuroscience (NSCI 774);
    - Functional Neuroanatomy (NSCI 764);
    - Experimental Design and Analysis (NSCI SPTP 793B);
  - And a minimum of 1 elective such as a proseminar (e.g., Proseminar in Behavioral Neuroscience, Proseminar in Stroke, Proseminar in Neuroendocrinology, Proseminar in Neurodegenerative Diseases or Proseminar in Neural Circuits).
    - Additional electives may be helpful in completing the dissertation and should be approved in consultation with the advisor and dissertation committee;
- Enrollment in Neuroscience Journal Club (NSCI 760) during the first three years;
  - Beginning year 4 through completion of degree, student should enroll in/attend a journal club selected by the student and advisor;
- Enrollment each year in Neuroscience FORUM (NSCI 761), this includes one presentation of a research seminar to the program faculty and fellow students each year;
  - The first presentation will be in the second semester of year 2;
- Attendance at all Neuroscience-sponsored seminars (Students are not required to enroll in Seminar, but are expected to attend);

- A scientific writing course (e.g., BMS 720);
- Dissertation research:
  - Students must register for research credits each semester as NSCI 797. Performance is graded satisfactory, unsatisfactory, or incomplete by their dissertation advisor. The expected learning outcomes, mechanism of evaluation and criteria for grading for this course is described in the NSCI 797 syllabus. Students are expected to make progress on their research while engaging in course work, journal club, teaching, and seminar attendance.

## **B. Program Milestones**

- A written F31+Document and Oral Defense presented in an open forum and to the dissertation committee and successfully completed prior to the beginning of the 3rd year (i.e. before the first day of classes of year 3). The F31+Document is an NIH F31 fellowship application with an expanded Rigor of Prior Research/Literature Review section (the “+” in the F31+ should be an appendix to the F31 and the F31 itself must meet the page limits for an F31 (Abstract (30 lines), Narrative (3 sentence), Specific Aims (1 page), and Research Strategy (6 pages)) (page length of the Rigor of Prior Research suggested by the respective dissertation committee); The expanded Rigor of Prior Research/Literature Review section may become a stand-alone publication and/or the basis for an external fellowship application.
- Successfully conduct an original research project resulting in (at least) one first-author peer-reviewed publication and another publication (authorship not specified); the first-authored paper must be based on their Ph.D. dissertation research, in a nationally or internationally recognized scientific peer-reviewed journal;
- A written PhD dissertation that is successfully defended in an open forum leading to the approval of both the oral defense and the written dissertation by the dissertation committee and subsequently submitted electronically to the WVU Theses and Dissertations (ETD) office;
- Teaching: participation in teaching is not a requirement of the program. However, students are encouraged to gain experience in teaching. One possible teaching opportunity available for neuroscience students is to participate as a graduate assistant in Fundamentals of Neuroscience (NSCI 774);
- Individual Development Plan (IDP) (see below for more information); and
  - Beginning in year 2, there must be at least one Graduate Dissertation Committee Meeting per year: Annual Review Report and a Dissertation Committee Meeting Evaluation Form submitted to the Program. Beginning in year 5, there must be at least two dissertation committee meetings per year with the Neuroscience Graduate Program Director in attendance and a Graduate Dissertation Committee Meeting: Annual Review Report, and a Dissertation Committee Meeting Evaluation Form submitted to the Program.
- (1) Experiential Learning credits.

## **C. Individual Development Plan (IDP)**

The IDP provides resources to help students evaluate skills and interests in:

- Scientific Knowledge
- Research Skills



- Communication (writing and speaking)
- Professionalism
- Management and Leadership
- Responsible Conduct of Research
- Career advancement
- Networking with professionals in the student's field of study.

This information will help the student build the necessary skill set to achieve career success and to make decisions regarding future career options. The role of the dissertation mentor is to help the student to achieve these skills. Students need to review their IDP annually with their advisor.

All Biomedical Sciences Graduate programs will use the IDP template found on the Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs SOLE site. All incoming Biomedical students will complete this IDP and discuss it with a faculty advisor during Orientation, the week before fall semester begins. Once the student joins a laboratory, he/she is to review the IDP with the dissertation mentor. The IDP needs to be reviewed annually and reported using the IDP Annual Review form (available under Forms). Once the form has been submitted, it will be filed in the student's file in the Office of Research and Graduate Education.

Timeline of the standard Neuroscience Curriculum requirements is provided on the next page:  
(Please note: 1 elective is required and not listed in the table below)

## Neuroscience Graduate Program Curriculum & Benchmarks

	Year 1			Year 2					
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer			
Curriculum	Foundations	Neuroanatomy	Scientific Writing	Fundamentals of Neuroscience	Experimental Design and Analysis	Research			
	Research Rotations	Forum	Research	Forum	Forum				
		Seminar		Seminar	Seminar				
		Journal Club		Journal Club	Journal Club				
		Research		Research	Research				
		Sci. Rigor and Ethics		Proseminar	Proseminar				
		Prof. for Sci. 2							
Benchmarks	Individual Development Plan			Update Individual Development Plan	F31+Document and Oral Defense				
				Form Dissertation Thesis Committee					
				1 <sup>st</sup> committee meeting					
				Plan of Study					
	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5+		
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer
Curriculum	Forum	Forum	Research	Forum	Forum	Research	Forum	Forum	Research
	Seminar	Seminar		Seminar	Seminar		Seminar	Seminar	
	Journal Club	Journal Club		Journal Club	Journal Club		Journal Club	Journal Club	
	Research	Research		Research	Research		Research	Research	
Benchmarks	Individual Development Plan			Update Individual Development Plan			Update Individual Development Plan		Dissertation Defense
	Annual committee meeting			Annual Committee Meeting			Annual Committee Meeting		
				Update Plan of Study if needed					

## **E. Neuroscience MD/PhD Students**

The Neuroscience Graduate Program welcomes students in the MD/PhD program. MD/PhD students typically join the Neuroscience Program after successful completion of the USMLE Step 1 National Exam at the end of the second year of the medical school curriculum.

- Successful completion of the two-year medical school curriculum at WVU will satisfy the Common Core Curriculum and Neuroscience course requirements (NSCI 774). MD/PhD students are required to take two additional electives recommended by the dissertation committee.
- Laboratory rotations, leading to the selection of the dissertation advisor, are chosen through the MD/PhD program and are completed prior to the entry of the student into the PhD portion of the curriculum. Selection of the dissertation advisor should be completed prior to entering the Neuroscience Graduate Program.
- Dissertation committee must be selected during the first year of the PhD phase.
- Each student must meet with their committee at least once per year beginning in the spring semester of year 2. In Year 5 and later years, meeting frequency will increase to twice per year, and the Program Director will attend these meetings.
- A F31+Document and oral defense is required and will follow the format listed for regular graduate students. It is recommended that this be completed during the first year after entering the PhD phase of the program, but it must be completed by the end of the fall semester of the second year in the PhD phase. An F31+Document is an NIH F31 traineeship application with an expanded Rigor of Prior Research/Literature Review section (page length unspecified). Failure to complete the F31+Document and Oral Defense by this deadline will result in dismissal from the doctoral graduate program unless prior approval is provided by the Office of Research and Graduate Education.
- MD/PhD students will register for the Neuroscience Journal Club and Neuroscience Forum during the PhD phase. An alternative Journal Club may be selected after two years of the Neuroscience Journal Club.
- Students will take the course in scientific ethics taught by the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.
- MD/PhD students are required to attend all Neuroscience-sponsored seminars.
- Requirements for the F31+Document and oral defense, candidacy, dissertation research, dissertation defense, and graduation requirements are identical to those described for regular Neuroscience PhD candidates.

A timeline of the MD/PhD Neuroscience Curriculum requirements is provided on the next page:  
(Please note: 1 elective is required and not listed in the table below)

MD/PhD Curriculum & Benchmarks									
	Year 1			Year 2					
	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring			
Curriculum	Research	Forum	Forum	Research	Forum	Exp. Design Analys			
		Seminar	Seminar		Seminar	Forum			
		Journal Club	Journal Club		Journal Club	Seminar			
		Research	Research		Research	Journal Club			
			Sci. Rigor and Ethics		Proseminar	Research			
			Prof. for Sci. 2			Scientific Writing			
						Proseminar			
Benchmarks	Individual Development Plan					F31+Document and Oral Defense			
						Form Dissertation Thesis Committee			
						1 <sup>st</sup> committee meeting			
						Plan of Study			
						Update Individual Development Plan			
Curriculum	Year 3			Year 4			Year 5+		
	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring
	Research	Forum	Forum	Research	Forum	Forum	Research	Forum	Forum
		Seminar	Seminar		Seminar	Seminar		Seminar	Seminar
		Journal Club	Journal Club		Journal Club	Journal Club		Journal Club	Journal Club
		Research	Research		Research	Research		Research	Research
Benchmarks		Update IDP			Update IDP			Update IDP	Dissertation Defense
		Annual Committee Meeting			Annual Committee Meeting			Annual Committee Meeting	
					Update Plan of Study if needed				

**REGISTERING FOR CREDITS:** To receive a stipend, students are required to register for a minimum of 9 credits for the fall and spring semesters and a minimum of 1 credit for the summer semester. Students may find it more cost effective to register for more credits during the summer session; a calculator for this is available on the Office of Graduate Education and Life website. Credit hours exceeding 16 require prior approval by the Associate Provost for Graduate Education of WVU.

Once candidacy is achieved, the student should register for at least one credit as a candidate in all semesters and summer sessions until they successfully defend. However, if a student is receiving a stipend, the student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credit hours per WVU policy in order to continue receiving their stipend.

## **VI. Work Schedule, Sick Leave, Vacation and Leave of Absence Policy**

*The PhD degree is awarded based on completion of original dissertation research, not on time served in the program. Undue time spent away from the University will hamper your progress in research.*

### **A. Work Schedule**

The first year of study focuses primarily on didactic education. In the fall semester, students can expect to follow the academic calendar of the University for the holidays that take place within that semester. After the first semester, expectations vary between laboratories; students and mentors should discuss this at the beginning of the rotation. Students are entitled to days off when the university is closed, but when the university is open and there are no classes, the student should still be present or have an alternate plan arranged with their mentor. Those are not automatic days-off.

Time spent on dissertation research will vary depending on the other courses the student is taking and other programmatic activities. The expectation is that this will occupy the majority of the student's time if they are to complete their research and graduate in a timely fashion. In this regard, time spent on dissertation research is not equated with the number of credits taken in the 797 research course. Work schedule is agreed upon by the student and mentor. These schedules will vary between laboratories and the nature of the research.

### **B. Wellness & Illness**

The health and wellness of students, faculty, and staff is a priority of WVU's Health Sciences Center. While graduate school is a full time investment of substantial time and work, sometimes students may face situations where they feel unwell. This may not require seeking medical attention but rather taking-off a half or full day from work to alleviate this situation. We expect mentors to be flexible when students need to take time off for both wellness related issues and illness. These may be referred to as Mental Health Days or Sick Days.

Absenteeism from classes, graduate program activities, and the laboratory must be considered carefully, as it can interfere with progress in the graduate program and time to degree. Keeping an open dialogue between mentor and mentee around strategies to maintain progress is critical. Absenteeism from classes and other events needs to be communicated to each faculty member coordinating a class or event.

### **C. Personal Leave**

All graduate students may take up to 2 weeks of personal time-off per calendar year; these are in addition to the standard [University holidays](#) (when the university is closed). Personal leave may include time away for illness, vacation, or any other reason that the student needs time away from their graduate program responsibilities. The implementation and timing of the personal leave should be discussed with the primary advisor such that arrangements can be made for laboratory activities in the student's absence. These expectations are likely to vary among research laboratories, so it is important to establish these expectations upon entry in the laboratory. Students on a VISA and leaving the country are to schedule a meeting at least one month prior to departure with Joe Andria (jandra@hsc.wvu.edu) to ensure that all paperwork and assurances have been completed and to receive a letter requesting their return.

### **D. Graduate Assistant Modification of Duty Policy**

West Virginia University offers graduate assistants (GAs) an opportunity to apply for a period of time away from assistantship duties. The request may be made when the GA requires time for the birth/adoption of a child, for illness or injury, bereavement or to care for an immediate family member with a serious health condition. During the time away, known as a Modification of Duty (MOD), the GA may keep their stipend and associated assistantship benefits. An MOD applies only to assistantship responsibilities. GAs must also discuss their academic plans with the appropriate advisor(s) for their program. The [application process](#) is designed to assure that the request for an MOD involves all the appropriate offices at WVU while handling sensitive information correctly. The complete policy can be found here: [Modification of Duties \(MOD\) Policy for Graduate Assistants](#).

### **E. Leave of Absence**

The Health Sciences Center has a defined policy to deal with extended periods of time outside of the laboratory or class, generally greater than six weeks. Termed a Leave of Absence (LOA), students may formally request time away from the program due to medical, personal, and/or academic matters. In some circumstances, the leave may be imposed upon the student administratively due to academic issues or policy violations. Procedures for this are detailed in this policy (included in the appendix) and there are forms for documenting all types of leave and any expectations or requirements upon the student's return.

### **Grading and handling of courses during a leave of absence**

When a student goes on a leave of absence, issues develop regarding the grading of courses when the leave begins mid semester. Largely, this will need to be handled on a case-by-case basis. For defined courses, the student will need to work with the instructor to come up with a strategy and generally will need to take an "I" (Incomplete). Courses like research and seminar (when used to monitor attendance) generally do not have a mechanism to fulfill an incomplete. If the length of the leave is known and it is before the deadline to withdraw, it would be best for the student to withdraw from these courses during the semester. If that deadline has past, a student in good standing should be able to receive a grade reflecting their participation prior to the leave, especially when the course is graded S/U (Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory) or P/F (Pass/Fail). Journal

clubs can be handled by having the student write summaries of papers that were missed. If the student is having a major medical crisis and cannot work during the leave, then the student should be graded for the time in the course or given an incomplete and a protocol developed for making up missed work.

### **Mental Health Resources**

College students commonly experience difficulties that may interfere with academic success. Stress, sleep problems, relationship and social concerns, adjustment to college, financial problems, family issues, discrimination, or anxiety and depression all affect one's ability to remember, learn and perform. If you or a friend is struggling, we strongly encourage you to seek support. Supportive, confidential resources are available on campus, and most are at no-charge. The BeWell office is the counseling hub for all Health Sciences students. BeWell offers short-term individual counseling, consultations and various other mental health services.

- You can schedule an appointment with BeWell by emailing the BeWell Coordinator, Layne Hitchcock, at [Layne.kehl@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Layne.kehl@mail.wvu.edu).
- You can also schedule by calling [304-293-1292](tel:304-293-1292) or [304-293-1353](tel:304-293-1353).
- You can request an appointment online at [health.wvu.edu/bewell/request-an-appointment](http://health.wvu.edu/bewell/request-an-appointment).
- Feel free to visit BeWell's website for more information at [health.wvu.edu/bewell](http://health.wvu.edu/bewell).

BeWell is an extension of WVU's main counseling center. Please note that if you or a friend is experiencing a more urgent or crisis situation, the Carruth Center for Counseling and Psychological Services at WVU provides crisis consultation and counseling during normal business hours (8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.) as well as after hours.

You can access these services 24/7 by calling [304-293-4431](tel:304-293-4431). Crisis services are also available through text: Text WVU to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained crisis counselor.

For more mental health resources and information, visit the Carruth Center website at

## **VII. Academic and Professional Standards**

### **A. Academic Standards**

#### **1. Standards**

It is expected that students will perform satisfactorily on all required courses. To remain in good standing in the PhD program, a student is required to maintain the following standards:

- An overall grade point average of 3.0 in graduate level coursework. Note that this is higher than the university standard of 2.75;
- Removal of any incomplete grades within one semester or summer session of receiving it, unless special permission is granted by the Assistant Vice President for Research. Failure to remove an incomplete within one semester results in a permanent F on the student's transcript and this F figures into the GPA; and
- Satisfactory written comments describing the student's performance in short rotations.
- Students have one semester to raise their overall GPA to 3.0 or higher.

Failure to comply with these standards will result in the student being placed on academic probation and may result in dismissal from the graduate program.

#### **2. Grading System and Reporting of Grades**

Graduate courses are graded as follows: A, B, C, or F, and P (pass) or F (fail). The course coordinator may submit letter grades with + or -, but the grade point average (GPA) is calculated using the basic letter grade. Grades of F are not acceptable for course credit toward a graduate degree but are used in calculating the GPA. Letter grades are given for the Biomedical lab experience (BMS 702; also known as rotations) in Year

1. Research NSCI 797 is graded S/U; U's in research are not counted for the calculation of the GPA. The first unsatisfactory (U) grade for NSCI797 results in placement of the student on probation; a second U in research NSCI 797 is grounds for dismissal from the graduate program.

The grade of Incomplete (I) is given when the instructor believes that the course work or other required programmatic activity is incomplete. All incompletes must be removed within the next semester of the calendar year; however, an individual instructor may require their removal within a shorter period. Students who receive an incomplete grade must contact the faculty member who issued the incomplete to discuss its removal. If an incomplete is not rectified within the next semester, it will be changed to a grade of F (IF).

*NOTE: Students cannot graduate with an F grade on the Plan of Study. The course must be retaken and the grade brought into the acceptable range. Both grades will count toward the GPA on the transcript, and the higher grade will be placed in the Plan of Study.*

### **B. Professional Standards**

Graduate students in the seven Biomedical Graduate Programs, the MS in Biomedical Sciences, the MS in Health Sciences, and first year students in the Biomedical Science Graduate Program are expected to adhere to the following standards of behavior throughout their tenure in graduate school. This code governs student behavior in classrooms, research



endeavors, academic and professional gatherings, travel and in their daily conduct outside of the University. In addition to the code outlined below, all students will uphold the WVU Student Conduct and Discipline Policy. This code can be found at: <https://studentconduct.wvu.edu/campus-student-code>

### **1. Academic Integrity**

Student Expectations:

- Students will not plagiarize the work of others, either by directly copying that work or by summarizing the thoughts of others as their own;
- Students will not cheat on any examinations, on academic assignments and activities, not use any form of natural language processing tool driven by artificial intelligence technology (e.g., ChatGTP) unless explicitly allowed by the course instructor, and will not provide unauthorized help to others during an examination or graded academic assignment;
- Students will not alter examination scores, answer sheets, other graded materials or their academic record;
- Students will adhere to the University policies on academic integrity, found at: (<http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/enrollmentandregistration/#academicdishonestytext>)

### **2. Scientific Integrity**

Students will:

- Accurately report how experiments were conducted;
- Represent their best understanding of their work in their descriptions and analyses of it;
- Accurately describe methods used in experiments;
- Abstain from falsely representing the work of others as if it were their own;
- Adequately summarize previous relevant work in their publications;
- When acting as reviewers, students will treat submitted manuscripts and grant applications confidentially and avoid inappropriate use; and
- Disclose financial and other interests that might present a conflict-of-interest in their various activities, such as reporting research results, serving as reviewers and mentoring students;
- Adhere to the University Research Integrity Procedures that can be viewed at: [https://oric.research.wvu.edu/files/d/a6c5bbb8-f806-489a-b16b-e0da5f81970d/research-integrity\\_policy\\_amended\\_6-13-16\\_final-2.pdf](https://oric.research.wvu.edu/files/d/a6c5bbb8-f806-489a-b16b-e0da5f81970d/research-integrity_policy_amended_6-13-16_final-2.pdf)

### **3. Scientific citizenship**

Students will:

- Strive to provide timely, efficient and high-quality work;
- Function as an effective and respectful team member in the performance of collaborative research;
- Strive to always acknowledge the contributions of their co-workers;
- Strive to keep all work areas clean, organized and conducive to high-quality research;
- Respect shared work areas and reagents and ensure that steps are taken to replenish reagents when they are in low supply;

- Refrain from activities that might be disruptive to the work of others, including playing music, conversation and telephone calls;
- Be attentive in presentations by colleagues and provide constructive criticism as appropriate;
- Seek and accept criticism without reprisal or defensiveness;
- Strive to address and remedy situations as they arise and follow through on all promises and commitments to co-workers;
- Wear appropriate clothing in the laboratory and other research settings that is consistent with federal, state, and University regulations;
- Speak-up and report any practice, condition or situation that may cause harm or that is against federal, state and University regulations;
- When traveling as a representative of the University and laboratory, the student will behave in a professional manner, uphold the rules of the laboratory with respect to the sharing of data, report expenses in a truthful manner, and refrain from frivolous use of travel funds for meals or modes of transportation that are unnecessary.

#### **4. Professional interactions**

Students will:

- Strive to increase their knowledge and expertise to maintain qualifications consistent with the highest standards available in their discipline;
- Accept and adapt to the continual change inherent in the creation and delivery of knowledge;
- Be appropriate in dress, language, and demeanor and avoid language and dress that is offensive to others;
- Respect and protect the rights to privacy and confidentiality of all students, staff, faculty, study participants, and patients;
- Minimize personal text messaging, e-mailing, telephone calls, and social media while at work;
- Respond to all communications in a timely manner;
- Listen carefully and be thoughtful and respectful in all forms of communication and during the attendance of seminars;
- Provide training and experience to advance the scientific skills and knowledge of ethical research practices for any trainee under their supervision;
- Treat all individuals in a caring, respectful, professional, and empathic manner.

### **C. Graduate Programs Committee on Academic and Professional Standards (GP-CAPS)**

#### **1. GP-CAPS Membership**

During the first year in graduate school, student compliance with these academic and professional standards is monitored by GP-CAPS. This committee has representatives from all seven Biomedical PhD programs and the clinical and translational science graduate programs. Following the first year, issues related to academic or professional standards are first evaluated by the program faculty and then for issues of dismissal or appeals by GP-CAPS.

## **2. Student Review and Appeals Policy**

Students have the right to due process in all decisions regarding their grades, evaluations, and status in graduate school. Appeals regarding the above must follow a standard set of procedures. Procedures for student appeals can be found in the Graduate Catalog <http://catalog.wvu.edu/graduate/>

## **VIII. ADVANCEMENT TO CANDIDACY: F31+DOCUMENT AND ORAL DEFENSE**

### **I. Advancement to Candidacy**

Advancement to Candidacy is a process of validation by the Neuroscience Program Faculty that a student enrolled in the PhD program has acquired sufficient core knowledge and academic skills to initiate dissertation research leading to the PhD degree. This is demonstrated, in part, by obtaining a grade of B or better in the core Neuroscience coursework.

The Advancement process involves two separate activities – Writing the F31+ document and an oral defense:

#### **1. F31+ Document and Oral Defense**

Successful defense of a proposal outlining the student's dissertation research marks the entrance to PhD candidacy. Timely completion of this benchmark not only provides a guide for the remainder of the research, but also provides an excellent springboard from which to apply for an external fellowship. The proposal defense begins with the preparation of a fellowship application in the style of a National Institutes of Health (NIH) F31. Portions of this grant application will be drafted during the Scientific Writing course. The proposed research will be presented in a formal seminar open to the faculty, graduate students and other interested people followed by an oral defense of the proposal to the student's dissertation committee.

The following sections must be included in the dissertation proposal:

1. Abstract and narrative;
2. Table of contents;
3. Biographical sketch;
4. Literature review (this is the “+” aspect of the modified F31);

The Literature Review should assess the rigor of prior research and should be written according to the instructions provided by the NIH for F31 applications. See below:

*A careful assessment of the rigor of the prior research that serves as the key support for a proposed project helps to identify weaknesses or gaps in a line of research. NIH expects applicants to describe the general strengths and weaknesses in the rigor of the prior research (both published and unpublished) that serves as the key support for the proposed project. It is expected that this consideration includes attention to the rigor of the previous experimental designs, as well as the incorporation of relevant biological variables and authentication of key resources. Applicants are expected to include plans to address any weaknesses or gaps identified. More information at <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/reproducibility/guidance.htm>.*

5. Specific aims – at least 2 aims are recommended – 1-page limit.  
It is understood that these aims may change over the course of the research just as they do for the mentor's grants. Likewise, it is not intended that every aim must be accomplished to complete the PhD degree. However, revisions to aims must be presented to and approved by the advisory committee.
6. Research Strategy – suggested 10-page limit;  
Each Aim should contain the following sections (length is per aim):
  - A. Rationale (1 paragraph);
  - B. Experimental plan and specific methods as appropriate (1-2 pages);
  - C. Expected results (1/2 page).
  - D. A short section describing Alternative Approaches (3/4 pages).
7. Literature Cited (no page limit).

**Note:** The page limits are for single-spaced type. The acceptable fonts are Arial, Helvetica, Palatine Linotype or Georgia and a font size of 11 or 12 points. The type density should be no more than 15 characters per inch and 6 lines per inch. One-half inch margins should be used on all sides but not greater than 1 inch. If the student chooses to convert this proposal to an actual fellowship application, then they will need to consult the directions for the additional sections required by the NIH.

### **Oral Proposal Defense**

It is recommended that the proposal be defended in the Summer semester of the student's second year in graduate school. If the proposed defense is not successful, then the student may petition their dissertation committee to revise the proposal and defend a second time.

**Successful defense of the research proposal must occur on or before the last day of Year 2**, (i.e. on or before the first day of classes of year 3). Failure to pass the defense by this date will result in dismissal from the graduate program. Students with extreme circumstances may petition for a delay in this deadline. The petition must occur in writing to the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education and must include a strong rationale for the delay.

It is strongly recommended that eligible students submit their F31 to seek a fellowship from a national funding agency. These include agencies, such as the NIH (F30, F31, F31 diversity) and private foundations including the AHA, among others. Students who choose to apply for a pre-doctoral fellowship should consult the Health Sciences Graduate Programs site on SOLE for helpful hints and guides on how to construct this application. To help increase the likelihood of submitting a competitive fellowship application, it is recommended that students participate in an F31 Writing Group offered by the Office of Research and Graduate Education.

### **IX. Dissertation Research, Dissertation Defense and Graduation.**

With successful completion of the F31+ Document and Oral Defense, the student advances to candidacy for the PhD degree and the 5-year WVU-mandated clock for completion of the degree starts. Note however, that the expectation is that the student will defend their dissertation within 5-6 years of entering the program. The graduate program director will

recommend to the graduate council that the student be elevated to candidacy for the PhD degree. The committee chair (student's advisor) will submit to the Health Sciences Graduate Programs Office a completed Doctoral Preliminary Examination Form indicating the successful completion of the written and oral qualifying exam and a Doctoral Candidacy Examination Form indicating successful completion of the F31+Document and Oral Defense. The Plan of Study Form should also be completed and submitted to the Graduate Programs Office at this time. Copies of these forms can be downloaded from the (<https://sole.hsc.wvu.edu/>): Health Sciences Center Graduate Programs SOLE site...Content...FORMS-HSC Graduate Students.

## **1. Dissertation Research**

Students will conduct research with a dissertation mentor during their time in the program. Students will register for research credits each semester. A research grade is determined each semester (including summer) by their dissertation mentor and committee and by completing program requirements in each semester.

## **2. Dissertation Defense**

- A.** Students must have two published manuscripts, one of which must be based on their Ph.D. dissertation research as first author, published or accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. In the case of joint first-author manuscripts, the manuscript typically only fulfills this requirement for one author. This requirement should not be misinterpreted to mean that the student is necessarily able to graduate once they have the required publications. The decision of when a student has completed the aims for their dissertation rests with the dissertation advisory committee. With some research projects, this will result in more than two publications. (Additional information can be found in the "HSC PhD Program Policy on First Author Publication Requirement for Graduation (Updates for 2025)" found in the *Handbook for the Graduate Program in the Biomedical and Clinical & Translation Sciences/First-Year Handbook*.)
- B.** The form of the dissertation will be decided by the graduate advisory committee and must be consistent with the School of Medicine Guidelines for Theses and Dissertations, as well as the guidelines published in WVU's Graduate Catalog. A copy of the dissertation must be delivered to the advisory committee and the graduate office at least two weeks prior to the defense of the dissertation.
- C.** A Request to Schedule Final Defense form must be submitted to the Health Sciences Graduate Programs Office 2 weeks prior to the defense date to allow the Office of Research and Graduate Education sufficient time to process and communicate the Dissertation Defense to the University community.
- D.** The final examination for the PhD degree consists of:
  - i. Orally defending the dissertation in a public seminar and then in a closed session with the graduate dissertation committee;
  - ii. Final approval by the dissertation committee of the written dissertation;
  - iii. The committee will jointly decide if the student's oral defense has passed or failed. Separately, the committee will either approve the written dissertation as is, approve the dissertation with revisions, or refuse to pass the dissertation.
  - iv. If the dissertation is not approved, the dissertation should be rewritten and resubmitted within a deadline decided upon by the committee and approved by

the graduate program office and the VP of Graduate Education.

- v. If approved with revisions, the revised dissertation should be re-submitted to the committee (or to select members thereof) no later than 30 days following

the dissertation defense.

- vi. Final approval of both the oral exam and written dissertation will be conveyed by committee members signing the appropriate forms, which will also constitute permission to submit the dissertation to the WVU Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) office.

**3. Graduation Requirements: the following is a list of requirements for graduation.**

- A. 3.00 GPA, no D's or F's, and no U's in research;
- B. Proper registration and payment of fees. Once candidacy is achieved, the student should register for at least one credit as a candidate in all semesters and summer sessions until they successfully defend. However, if a student is receiving a stipend, the student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credit hours per WVU policy in order to continue receiving their stipend. Credit hours exceeding 16 require prior approval by the Associate Provost for Graduate Education of WVU. Students can visit the Revenue Services website to learn more about the fee amounts for each semester (<https://revenueservices.wvu.edu/tuition-and-fees>).
- C. Passage of the benchmark exams:
  - i. F31+Document and Oral Defense (candidacy exam);
  - ii. A written PhD dissertation that is successfully defended in an open forum leading to the approval of both the oral defense and the written dissertation by the dissertation committee and subsequently submitted to the WVU Theses and Dissertations (ETD) office;
- D. Annual reports of completion of the IDP and advisory committee meetings;
- E. Two manuscripts, at least one as first author based on the dissertation research (see above for journal requirements);
- F. Submission of required approval forms;
- G. Electronic submission of dissertation;
- H. Application for graduation and diploma Form; and
- I. Exit interview with Assistant VP for Graduate Education.

**4. Deadline for completion of the degree**

The University policy requires a student to complete their PhD within 5 years of successfully being admitted into candidacy, typically this is 5 years after passing their candidacy exam/proposal defense. In extraordinary circumstances, students can petition for an extension of the time to degree. This petition must be approved by both the graduate program director and the Assistant Vice President for Graduate Education. Only one extension will be allowed and will not exceed 1 year.

Students entering their 6th year in graduate school will need to have committee meetings every 6 months in order to monitor progress. Failure to meet the committee meeting requirement may result in suspension of the student's stipend and tuition waiver until this requirement is met.

If a student does not complete degree requirements within the timeline designated in university policy, they may be dismissed from the program. They may also be able to

transfer into a master's degree program if one is available that allows them to complete the MS degree requirements within 2 semesters. Students in this situation who transfer to an MS degree should not expect to receive a GA position with associated stipend and tuition waiver. Additionally, graduate course work used to meet master's degree requirements must be satisfactorily completed within a period of eight years immediately preceding the conferring of the degree to ensure that students earning a master's degree have current knowledge in their field.



I have read, I acknowledge, and I agree to abide by the provisions of this Neuroscience Handbook.

---

Name

---

Signature

---

Date